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C O N F I D E N T I A L KINGSTON 001270

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STATE FOR WHA/CAR (RANDALL BUDDEN)

E.O. 12958: DECL: 08/18/2016

TAGS: PREL PGOV PTER PINR SOCI ASEC CASC JM

SUBJECT: JAMAICA: POLITICAL RAMIFICATIONS OF HURRICANE DEAN

Classified By: Ambassador Brenda L. Johnson for reasons 1.4(b) and (d)

1.(SBU) Summary: As of August 19, 2007, Hurricane Dean is still a category-4 hurricane, but some predictions show it increasing to a category-5 before it leaves the vicinity of Jamaica and the Cayman Islands. The latest computer models have the eye of the storm passing just South of Jamaica, meaning the dangerous winds could strike Kingston. According to local media accounts, as of 1530 local time, the airport road is impassable. National Elections for Jamaica are scheduled for August 27, 2007, with the police and military scheduled to vote early on Tuesday, August 21. If the Government of Jamaica (GOJ) declares an emergency, the Governor General will likely announce a postponement of voting. End Summary.

The Ambassador speaks to the Opposition Leader

2.(C) Ambassador Johnson spoke with Jamaican Prime Minister Portia Simpson-Miller (PM PSM) and Opposition Leader Bruce Golding (OPP LDR) via telephone on Sunday, August 19. OPP LDR was adamant that there was no need to declare a National State of Emergency. However, OPP LDR also expressed, "The Prime Minister is hell-bent on declaring a National State of Emergency." OPP LDR also stated that in a National State of Emergency all civil rights are suspended automatically, including habeas corpus, thus giving the ruling government and the Office of the Prime Minister extraordinary legal powers. OPP LDR recalled that in the 1970s a previous ruling government declared a National State of Emergency and used the special powers to have police arrest opposition party candidates, thus impeding the party's ability to campaign for election. OPP LDR expressed that it was unlikely that the security situation will warrant such drastic measures. OPP LDR expressed he had been in touch with key government personnel and had received no reports of looting or violence since the GOJ announced a nation-wide curfew on Saturday, August 18 at 1800 hours local time. However, when questioned by Ambassador Johnson, OPP LDR acknowledged that during Hurricane Ivan in 2004, the Prime Minister PJ Patterson declared a state of emergency prior to the hurricane reaching the island.

And with the Prime Minister

3.(C) PM PSM stated, during her August 19 phone conversation with Ambassador Johnson, that she was concerned with the possibility of post hurricane violence and looting. She said she had received reports of two shootings on August 19, one in August Town and one in another undisclosed area of Kingston. PM PSM has not stated when, or if, she will

declare a state of emergency. PM PSM maintained she was looking at all options, and that she was "concerned only for the People of Jamaica's well being, and not worrying about elections or political campaigns at this time." PM PSM did confirm that if she determines a National State of Emergency is necessary, would notify the Governor General (GG), who will make the formal announcement, in accordance with Jamaican Law. PM PSM further emphasized her concerns for the poor people of Jamaica, stating that once electricity from the national power grid is cut, water will also be cut off, and that the rich would likely have generators and other comforts in place, while the poor who live in the highest-risk areas will be isolated and likely unwilling to leave their homes.

PM willing to accept USG assistance after Dean passes

4.(SBU) Ambassador Johnson spoke with PM PSM a second time at approximately 1400 hours local time on Sunday, August 19. PM PSM was at her residence and expressed a desire to facilitate any USG assistance that could be provided to help the People of Jamaica. After Ambassador Johnson carefully explained all the necessary steps for OFDA, USAID, and other USG Agencies to provide USG disaster assistance to Jamaica, PM PSM said that Jamaica would accept any assistance the USG is able to provide. She stated that she understands the situation, and knows the GOJ cannot handle the situation without foreign assistance.

5.(C) With the approach of Dean, some commentators have criticized PM PSM's decision to call elections during the height of hurricane season. In the storm's aftermath, if the charismatic PM is widely perceived as energetically and successfully coordinating assistance and recovery, she could turn the disaster to her political advantage; conversely an appearance of poor coordination could weaken her support in the upcoming election. On the other hand, Bruce Golding, having been forced already to conduct an election campaign much longer than he had expected or wanted, now must face the prospect of still further delay in the national vote at a time when momentum seemed to be shifting his way. He will have a delicate task to conceal his frustration and make clear the welfare of Jamaicans is his top priority.

JOHNSON